Effective Management of Federal Grant Dollars: Council On Financial Assistance Reform (COFAR) Priorities for FY16-17

The Council on Financial Assistance Reform was established in 2011 as a governance body to provide policy level leadership for the Federal grants community. For more information please visit cfo.gov/cofar.

COFAR Priorities:
Strong Controls Yield Better Outcomes

Alignment with Performance Community (Evidence)

Alignment with Procurement Community (Spending Transparency)

1. Guidance Targets Risk & Minimizes Burden

5. Strong Program Oversight: Audit Resolution

2. Standardized Business Processes & Data

Better Outcomes for Grants

Alignment with CIO Community (Systems)

4. Well Trained Workforce

3. Spending Transparency

Alignment with GATB (Spending Transparency)

Uniform Guidance Implementation

Challenge

- Inconsistent interpretation and implementation of the guidance
- Influx of inquiries regarding the guidance
- Lack of institutionalized process to make updates and changes to Uniform Guidance

Accomplishments

- December 2014: 28 Federal awarding agencies adopted the Uniform Guidance and initial technical corrections published
- September 2015: Published updated FAQ and additional technical corrections
- September 2015: Published 2014 Administrative Baseline Metrics

Uniform Guidance Implementation

Short Term Deliverables

- December 2015: Publish Federal points of contact regarding implementation questions to COFAR website
- February 2016: Collect best practices from agencies and recipients

Long Term Deliverables

- Summer 2016: Analyze and publish 2015 metrics
- Summer 2016: Host training session to address FAQs and share best practices
- Fall 2016: Establish transparent process to update the Uniform Guidance

Grants Data Standardization

Challenge

- Over 800 distinct grant related OMB-approved information collections
- No current process to vet and validate existing data elements nor to create and validate new data elements
- Inconsistent data element definitions in existing policy and forms

Accomplishments

- May 2015: Published OMB memorandum "Increasing Transparency of Federal Spending by Making Federal Spending Data Accessible, Searchable, and Reliable"
- May 2015: Standardized initial set of DATA Act data elements
- May 2015: Launched DATA Act Section 5 Pilot, including the Common Data Element Repository (C-DER) Library
- August 2015: Standardized 42 additional data elements

Grants Data Standardization

Short Term Deliverables

- December 2015: Partner with USDS to conduct recipient outreach to identify recipient pain points and provide recommendations
- January 2016: Identify changes needed to existing guidance in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to implement DATA Act data standards
- Spring 2016: Identify Section 5 Pilot participants and begin testing
- Spring 2016: Issue policy guidance on DATA Act standards implementation
- May 2015 – 2017: Agency implementation of DATA Act data standards

Long Term Deliverables

- May 2016 – 2017: Year long data collection under the DATA Act Section 5 Pilot
- May 2016 – 2017: As part of iterative pilot effort, identify opportunities to further standardize forms and data collection
- August 2017: Report to Congress with recommendations to reduce recipient burden
- Summer 2016 – ongoing: work to further refine/develop data standards

Spending Transparency: Framework for Defining "Program"

Challenge

- There are multiple lenses of "program" across the government (e.g. CFDA, A-11 definitions of program activity, Federal program inventory) that do not aggregate transaction level spending into "programmatic areas"
- With respect to the assistance community, the CFDA, which is considered by many as a way to describe assistance "programs", has no clear guidance to ensure consistent agency establishment of CFDA numbers

Short Term Deliverables

- December 2015: Discuss CFDA policy approach at monthly meeting
- Spring/Summer 2016: Issue CFDA policy

Spending Transparency:
Framework for Defining "Program"

Long Term Deliverables

- Fall/Winter 2016: Work across federal councils of interest to identify a construct for "program" that would allow for alignment of spending to programmatic areas, with spending data sources validated by agency financial systems

Workforce Development

Challenge

- Lack of consistent standards for qualifying people to perform the grants management function
- No government-wide core training required of people performing the grants management function

Accomplishments

- April 2015: Finalized Grants 101 Course outline
- October 2015: Finalized content for Modules 1 and 2 of the Grants 101 Course

Workforce Development

Short Term Deliverables

- December 2015: Publish Modules 1 and 2 of Grants 101 Course
- April 2016: Publish Module 3 of Grants 101 Course

Long Term Deliverables

- Summer 2016: Test and implement use of resource repository
- Fall 2017: Establish government-wide credential framework or other long term vision

Strong Program Oversight: Audit Resolution

Challenge

- Over 4,000 audited programs failed to receive clean opinions in 2011
- Inconsistent implementation of Uniform Guidance Audit requirements
- Lack of tools to analyze audit data
- Quality of audits

Accomplishments

- December 2014: Enhanced reporting abilities available from the Federal Audit Clearinghouse
- February 2015: Tested MAX CUBE analytic capabilities
- May 2015: Identified Single Audit Senior Accountable Officials and Key Management Liaisons
- July 2015: Published 2015 Compliance Supplement

Strong Program Oversight: Audit Resolution

Short Term Deliverables

- December 2015: Publish 2014 Single Audit Metrics
- April 2016: Publish 2016 Compliance Supplement

Long Term Deliverables

- Summer 2016: Begin piloting streamlined process for single audit reporting as part of the DATA Act Section 5 Pilot
- Winter 2016: Analyze and publish 2015 single audit metrics
- Summer 2017: Review results of Single Audit reporting pilot
- Summer 2017: Revisit piloting MAX CUBE FAC analytics with agency data
- January 2018: Plan for quality controls review of single audit with CIGIE